

Leader's Guide

Session 1: Galatians 1

Describe a time when you felt trapped (bumper to bumper traffic, a job with no growth potential, crippling injury, etc.). How did you feel when you finally experienced freedom?

If you are currently in a situation where you feel trapped, how do you think you would feel if you experienced freedom from it? Why?

To one degree or another, we all know the hopelessness of feeling like there's no escape. Sometimes we feel that way in our Christian walk. Jesus calls us to live a free life, but we often lose sight of what that means. We're about to dive into the book of Galatians, a letter all about what it means to live free in Christ.

read

Read Galatians 1.

Watch

Show Session 1: *Galatians 1* (10:45 minutes)

discuss

Have you ever studied the book of Galatians previously? What did you learn from this session about Galatians that you did not know before?

Who wrote the letter to the Galatians? (Paul)

Kyle began by talking about "Institutional Syndrome." **How did he define this concept?** (A person who has spent so much time in prison that they do not know how to live free after being released.)

How did he connect Institutional Syndrome with the major theme of Paul's letter to the Galatians? (In Christ, the believers in Galatia had been set free, but began returning to their old lifestyles because they did not know how to live free.)

What would you say are some of the common things we "return" to as a result of not understanding how to live free? (religious systems, shame, guilt, fear, etc.)

In what ways have you experienced this in your own life (a return to unhealthy relationships, sexual immorality, gossip, manipulation, etc.)? How have you seen it demonstrated in the lives of others?

A relationship with Christ changes everything, which is part of why we spend our earthly lives learning to live as a new creation. By nature, we are drawn to sin, but through faith in Christ we are set free from the power of that nature even though its presence remains. Our struggle to live in the freedom we have in Christ is evidence of our continued need of the gospel, which is Paul's point in his letter to the Galatians. Someone read verses 1–5.

What word does Paul use to describe himself? ("apostle")

PEEK AT THE GREEK

Paul refers to himself using the Greek term *apostolos*, which means "apostle." This term and the meaning behind it take on a major significance throughout the book of Galatians. The noun form is a derivative of the verb *apostellein*, which mean "to send" or "to dispatch." At root, an apostle is one who is "sent" or "dispatched" in service to someone else. While Jesus had many disciples, He chose only twelve apostles during His earthly ministry (Luke 6:12–16). Following the betrayal of Judas Iscariot, the remaining apostles gathered together in order to select one as his replacement. At that time, they determined that a qualification for apostleship was to have been an eyewitness to the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ as well as His resurrection (Acts 1:21–22). Having encountered the resurrected Christ in person on the road to Damascus, Paul met the qualifications of apostleship (Acts 9:1–9). In other words, his message was more than trustworthy.

According to verse 1, from where does his apostleship derive?

Paul's introduction sets the tone for one of his central arguments throughout his letter to the Galatians. Apparently, some factions in the community were spreading doubt about the authenticity of his apostleship. From the start, Paul aims to make it clear that he has the credentials to be considered an apostle by the authority of Christ Himself.

What are the three acts Paul attributes to Jesus Christ in verse 4?

1. He gave himself for our sins,
2. To rescue us from the present evil age,
3. According to the will of our God and Father.

In verse 4, Paul describes the essentials of the gospel message—that Jesus Christ became our substitute by dying on the cross in our place to make a way for us to experience freedom from sin in obedience to the Father. This is the message Paul received from Christ and preached to the Galatians.

What does verse 4 communicate to us about the person and work of Jesus Christ? (He is more than merely a great teacher, but the means of our deliverance from sin and evil.)

What does verse 4 communicate to us about the condition of humanity? (We are helpless and lost in the battle against sin, which is why we need to be saved.)

What does it say about the character of the gospel that it comes from Jesus Christ? (It is not a human message. Rather, it originates with God Himself.)

Paul gets right to the point. In the first four verses, he highlights our sinful condition, our need for Christ, and the divine origin of the gospel God has extended to us through His Son. Having reminded his readers specifically of the gospel's divine origin, Paul goes on to admonish them for the ways they have begun to believe lies about it. Someone read verses 6–10.

How did Kyle describe Paul's main point in this passage? (Paul is trying to communicate that the divine origin of the gospel trumps all humanistic alternatives.)

How does Paul characterize the faith of the Galatians in verse 6?

PEEK AT THE GREEK

In verse 6, Paul uses the term *metatithesthai*, which is often translated “deserting.” Literally, it means “to change one’s mind” or “to turn away.” The Greek Old Testament used the word to translate a number of Hebrew terms related to geographic movement as well as allegiance from one citizenship to another. In other words, this term has a history of describing both political and military traitors, which is in effect what Paul accuses the Galatians of having done with their faith. While the present tense indicates an incomplete sense of the action, it describes a dire scene nonetheless. By returning to the moral aspects of the Law, the Galatians were committing treason against God and the freedom they had received through faith in Jesus Christ. It’s a stern warning to us today to consider where our allegiance truly lies.

As we’ve seen already, Paul’s understanding of the gospel is the substitutionary work of Jesus Christ, which is the means of our deliverance by faith. Any other message is no gospel at all.

How did a “different gospel” come to influence the Galatian community? (A group sought to throw into confusion the Galatian church and “pervert the gospel of Christ”)

What name did Kyle give to this outside group? (“Judaizers”)

Go Deeper

Learn more about the “Judaizers” from the following passages: Acts 15; Eph. 2:11–13; 1 Tim. 4:1–3

According to these passages, what were the “Judaizers” teaching? (Adherence to the Mosaic Law as a requirement for salvation, especially in regards to circumcision)

How does Paul describe such teachings? (Deceitful, demonic, hypocritical, and false)

What is the true message they sought to pervert (Gal. 2:16)?

Apparently, the Galatians both heard and embraced the gospel of Jesus Christ, but their faith was young and immature. When false teachings entered their community, rather than cling to the pure gospel, they began to return to their old life of adherence to the law, which ends up being no gospel at all.

What is legalism? How would you define it? (It is a belief that we can satisfy God through our good works.)

What were the two reasons Kyle mentioned that draw people to legalism?

1. It offers a method of measurement.
2. It offers a feeling of superiority.

How does legalism pervert the gospel? (Primarily, by adding works as a condition for our salvation.)

In what ways have you struggled with this kind of legalism in your own spiritual walk (comparing yourself to others, judging others for not following particular “rules,” treating bible study and church attendance like a to-do list, etc.)?

How does Paul respond to the Galatian church turning to a different gospel in verses 8 and 9?

It's interesting to note that Paul did not instruct the Galatians to commit their loyalties to him. He actually included himself as one who has the potential to preach a gospel contrary to that of Christ (v. 8). Rather, Paul exhorted the Galatians to cling embrace the unchanging message of Jesus Christ. The message is more important than the messenger.

Someone read verses 11–24.

Having established the unique content of the gospel (the message of salvation by grace through faith), Paul begins to defend the unique source of the gospel. **How did Kyle describe Paul's purpose in writing verses 11–12?** (Paul is highlighting the divine origin of the gospel by sharing how it was communicated to him.)

Leader: *If your group is unacquainted with the story of Paul's conversion, it may be worth flipping over briefly to Acts 9 and reading through the story of his transformation. Doing so not only provides background for the author of Galatians, but also gives a firsthand account of how he received the gospel directly from Jesus Christ.*

Why is this a significant point to make about the gospel message? (The fact that it came directly to Paul from God means he could not have made it up.)

In what ways does it contribute to Paul's central argument throughout the book of Galatians? (It strengthens his contention that he is worthy of the title of "apostle.")

Verses 13–24 offer a historical narrative of how Paul came to receive the gospel. But this section offers more than simply the truth of the gospel. By telling his story, Paul shows the power of the gospel to radically transform even the greatest of sinners.

How did Kyle describe Paul's closing point for chapter 1? (Paul shares his story to explain that the divine origin of the gospel is demonstrated through life transformation.)

The first chapter of Galatians confronts our doubts about the gospel in a profound way. The gospel of Jesus Christ is trustworthy because it is a message from God Himself and demonstrated through a long history of life transformation around the world, part of which includes the story of Paul.

As you reflect on your life, how have you changed as a result of knowing Christ?

How have you witnessed the life change of other Christians around you as a result of their embracing the gospel?

How should the gospel's source and fruits—as underscored by Paul—relieve your doubts about the gospel's power in your life?

last word

There is only one gospel and it is found through faith in Jesus Christ. Everything else, as Paul says, "is really no gospel at all" (v. 7). Our natural inclination as human beings trends toward works. We drift toward the lie that says we must play an active role in achieving and maintaining our salvation.

The truth is that only faith in Christ can ensure our righteousness before God. By believing in Christ, God counts the life, death, and resurrection of His Son as our own (v. 7). That is our hope in this life and in the next.

live it out

Pray: Praise God for the gospel as you pray this week. Thank Him for saving you and pray for opportunities to share the good news of Christ's life, death, and resurrection with others.

Share: Tell one person about how the gospel has affected your life. Explain how knowing Jesus has changed you.

Study: Read Acts 7:54–8:3 and 9:1–31 to study Paul's conversion. Make note of how encountering Jesus transformed Paul's life.

Reflect: This session introduced the idea of legalism. Spend time this week taking a personal inventory—do you believe your works save you or appease God? Has legalism cropped up in your life? Pray through your answers and tell another mature believer what you learned.

Worship: Pick a worship song that relays the full gospel and listen to it throughout the week. Play it in the car, while you're getting ready, or during dinnertime to remind yourself of the simple, pure gospel.